

# Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Note on Transliteration	ix
<b>1</b> Introduction	1
<b>2</b> The Pastoral Home School: Rural, Vernacular, and Grassroots Literacies in Early Socialist Mongolia	29
<b>3</b> How to Think Like a Socialist: Official Representations of Literacy in Socialist Mongolia	49
<b>4</b> Literacy under Authority: The Young Pioneers and the Cultural Campaigns	79
<b>5</b> Sponsorship and the Official Center of Post-Socialist Literacy	107
<b>6</b> Post-Socialist English and National Language Ideologies	135
<b>7</b> Urban Linguistic Landscapes and Post-Socialist Public Audiences	161
References	193
Index	213
About the Author	223

# *Chapter One*

## **Introduction**

Written by the fourteen-year-old Biziyaa Pürev (*Oral History of Twentieth Century Mongolia* 2013) from his fifth-grade school dormitory in the vast Mongolian countryside, this following letter is remarkable in many ways:

1961 November 7

Respected Mother Dulamjav, Sister Khaltarkhün, and Brother Dashzeveg,

I hope your work has been 100 percent successful. This semester at school things are going fine, and I am getting average marks. Right now we are on a school break. I miss you a lot. Here, it is very cold, and I'm freezing. There aren't any winter clothes. Please send me money in the mail and get me some boots. My feet are going to freeze. Here, there are no textbooks. I don't have anything to write with in class. Please send them. Give your letter to [Uncle] Jungaa. Then, write to me that you are going to pick me up. Send me a photograph, money, and stamps. I have received two letters from you. Also, I was very happy to receive a photograph in one of the letters. There's nothing else to report.

Your son, Pürev

This letter tells us a great deal about the story of literacy in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Mongolia. Yet in order to “read” this letter’s significance, readers will need to accept one of the main goals of *Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia*: not to take our reading and writing practices for granted. We need to de-naturalize reading and writing and pay more attention to literacy in our lives and its material, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts and consequences. Letters such as this one are the mundane genres that constitute the scene of literacy; in fact, readers may find this letter remarkable only due to the fact that this personal genre has

become rarer and less mundane in the twenty-first century because of the ways in which telecommunication and digital technologies have transformed our interpersonal communication.

If we historically and rhetorically situate Pürev's letter, we begin to perceive what it illuminates about literacy. When talking about his letter, Pürev claims he developed his writing ability in his four-year primary general education. Pürev points out that he had yet to take a composition class, contending that this letter represented his first "writing model" (*bichgiin khev*), the primary genre from which all of his subsequent writing descended. The historical context of Pürev's letter is critical. Beginning in the mid to the late 1950s, when Pürev began his general education, the Mongolian socialist government, which was dominated by the communist Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, transformed the pastoral countryside and the economic lives of the Mongolian semi-nomadic herders through the mass collectivization of families' animal herds and, at the same time, cultural campaigns aimed to modernize and rationalize the pastoralists' practices of hygiene, health, literacy, and political ideology. The formal, government-sponsored school was a key strategy to develop, modernize, rationalize, and "urbanize" (see Bruun 2006; Humphrey and Sneath 1999) the Mongolian pasture: these schools became fixed, sedentary institutions; most importantly, they focused on reading and writing, followed by heavy doses of Soviet socialist morality and character building, ideology, and hygiene awareness. In the middle of the 1950s, moreover, when Pürev began primary school, the socialist state made the first four years of general education compulsory (UNESCO 1971, 4). Literacy, therefore, becomes associated with these fixed, sedentary, and "urban" institutions and policies.

The dormitory building from which Pürev was writing was another key infrastructural development that began in the 1950s, which, according to Gita Steiner-Khamsi and Ines Stolpe (2006), demonstrated how Soviet socialism could be adapted by the Revolutionary Party to facilitate the Mongolian "proletariat," the semi-nomadic pastoralists. Living apart from their families in countryside dormitory schools became a new social experience for many Mongolian countryside children and adolescents. Literacy, in the genre of personal letters, as well as newspapers, scripted radio broadcasts, and governmental and party policies, subtly challenged the primary importance of the oral, intimate exchange of news and gossip (e.g., see Bruun 2006, 97–98; Humphrey 1994; Pedersen 2011). Finally, Pürev's letter suggests the existence of other important communication technologies and systems, such as photography, the access to which was a new phenomenon in larger urban areas, and more reliable postal routes, connecting the capital, Ulaanbaatar, to the *aimag* (state or province) centers, and then to the *sums* (equivalent to a

county or parish). The fact that Pürev wrote his letter on paper and ink necessitates the existence of, in the case of Mongolian socialism, planned production systems and both official and informal distribution systems. Widespread access to writing materials had only been available after World War II.

As Pürev's letter helps identify these relatively new literacy-related sponsors, institutions, practices, systems, and material artifacts, it also illuminates their inadequacies. He did not have adequate winter clothing, and his school and dormitory were not built to withstand the Mongolian winter cold. The socialist state did not provide enough textbooks and writing materials, a concern that marked the duration of the socialist education system (and the first decade of the post-socialist system), and because of which, students devised their own ways of obtaining paper and notebooks, creating ink and pens, and copying textbooks. In addition to these concerns, Pürev also relied on an informal means of distribution, his personal contact with relatives, to facilitate the exchange of letters, news, and other goods.

Beyond the immediate contexts of the cold November day, Pürev's letter serves new purposes and has been recontextualized or re-purposed to be read in ways other than an expressive, personal letter. Pürev's brother, Biziyaa Dashzeveg, a well-known journalist, kept the letter. Later, after the democratic and free-market reforms in the early 1990s, it was published in the national *Today (Ödriin Sonin)* newspaper to document school dormitory experiences and show a fifth-year Mongolian student's writing during the socialist period. This recontextualization has a political purpose, serving to critique the post-socialist educational system at the turn of the twenty-first century and raising concerns about poor literacy standards. When comparing his ability as a fifth-grade student in 1961 to contemporary students with an eleventh-grade education, Pürev criticizes their writing, claiming they make "30 mistakes" when writing out a 70-word dictation. In short, Pürev's letter reveals the promise of socialist education and serves as a powerful emblem for the authoritarian and unifying power of the socialist system. By reproducing Pürev's letter in this book, I am yet again recontextualizing it: Pürev's letter circulates in a new rhetorical context with different purposes and new, distant audiences.

*Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* asks readers to consider the significance of such mundane genres as personal letters, official education policies, public street and store signs, photographs, instructional materials, and evaluation systems; in addition to these, readers will be introduced to the sites of literacy learning and literacy events, which may include classrooms, homes, libraries, socialist-era "red gers" and "red corners" (areas devoted to socialist propaganda), and post-socialist virtual communities; furthermore, readers will become aware of the attitudes, beliefs, and discourses that constitute how Mongolians think and talk about reading and writing.

These aspects of literacy are important and fruitful when trying to make sense of the ways in which Mongolians have experienced tremendous social change over the past 100 years.

## WHY MONGOLIA AND WHY LITERACY?

Both within and outside Mongolia, historians, travel writers, journalists, tourist marketers, and a few scholars brand Mongolia with the symbols and images of tradition, authenticity, rugged individualism, the pastoral, and untouched isolation. The covers of *Lonely Planet Mongolia* travel guides depict these ideals of pastoralism and timelessness: women in *deels* (traditional Mongolian dress) riding camels, a pasture of horses, a white *ger* (round nomadic tent) framed in front of a mountain, and a solitary archer, among others. Writing about the sudden and dramatic transformation of the mining industry in Mongolia, Jonathan Watts (2011) suggests similar assumptions when he writes that Mongolians were on “the brink of one of the most dramatic transformations in human history.” Watts’s exaggeration works because he—and his readers—continue to define Mongolia in terms of this imagined ideal of authenticity, untouched isolation, and eternal traditions and values. Change, in this case, has only come about in the post-socialist era because of Mongolia’s new place as a provider of raw minerals for the highly globalized economy of China.

*Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* challenges these assumptions about Mongolia, insisting instead that readers recognize these ideals about Mongolia as rhetorical strategies used by Mongolians and others to serve their own cultural and political interests and agendas. Though rapid economic, environmental, and demographic change has undoubtedly marked the lives of Mongolians during the first three “transitional” decades of the post-socialist period, Mongolians have been constantly thrust into discourses of “revolution,” “transition,” “change,” and “reform” for more than the past 100 years. As the brief history in the second half of this introduction will demonstrate, Mongolians have experienced transitions from Qing empire (Manchu) colonization to a Tibetan Buddhist–dominated theocracy. After the 1921 People’s Revolution, Mongolians’ lives were strongly marked by the seven decades of authoritarian leadership of the Revolutionary Party, which engineered changes to the pastoral economy, cultural and religious practices, language, urbanization and industrialization, and international economic and political alliances. After the 1990 Democratic Revolution, Mongolians were precipitously thrown into free-market capitalism, democratic reforms, and

economic globalization. The “transition” of post-socialist Mongolia, in other words, has not been a new experience for most Mongolians.

The main goal of *Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* is to pay close attention to Mongolian social change in the past 100 years through the lens of literacy, which, for the purposes of this book, is a rich historical, social, and cultural variable that ties Mongolians to political and economic systems and reveals a great deal about how they think about the world and represent themselves and others. Literacy, as the following section makes clear, is not limited to analyses of formal education settings but contributes ethnographic, anthropological, and rhetorical perspectives to document social change (e.g., Barton 2009, 38; Papen 2007, 7). Additionally, literacy enables us to jump from relatively mundane, everyday experiences to the economic, political, historical, and technological forces that sponsor or structure these experiences.

In the socialist period, literacy was an important site of power and authority for the Revolutionary Party, such government entities as the Ministry of Enlightenment (later the Ministry of Education), the Academy of Sciences, and Soviet Mongolian international institutions. At stake were the constructions of new citizenship identities and new, modern subjectivities. As the first half of *Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* demonstrates, the Revolutionary Party and the socialist state invested heavily in literacy, competing with the literacy resources of pastoral home schooling and the Tibetan Buddhist Church, finding ways to represent literacy, and implementing mass literacy campaigns. These interventions constructed the identity of the New Mongolian Socialist Man or Woman, a modern subjectivity who wrote in the clean, modern Cyrillic script, read the appropriate texts in the right ways, ascended the requisite educational and political steps, and spoke Russian fluently in addition to Mongolian.

In post-socialist Mongolia, no longer does the state or a dominant institution appeal to such a pervasive, powerful, and single identity. Post-socialist and post-colonial Mongolia is also a post-modern Mongolia, with many fragmented and potential identities as well as a multitude of literacy practices, purposes, events, texts, genres, media, languages, and scripts. The post-socialist state no longer completely orchestrates the values and beliefs related to literacy, meaning that we, as language researchers, need to encounter complexity, diversity, and multiplicity as we search for the ways in which Mongolians define literacy and structure it as a meaningful aspect of their everyday lives. The second half of this book shows the ways that Mongolians are thrust into different forms of social change, including new ideological and conceptual flows about education from international aid organizations, new

and competing language ideologies, and new languages, scripts, and appeals that have transformed the linguistic decorum of urban spaces.

Before I expand upon the definition of literacy in the following section, allow me to address the fact that examining the socialist past may require additional justification for some readers. At the 2005 International Society for the History of Rhetoric conference, a Romanian scholar, when questioned about the lingering influences of Marxism and the Soviet Union on post-Ceaușescu Romania, sharply proclaimed that no such influences existed. According to this ideological position, literacy, language, or rhetoric researchers should act as if the Soviet era had never existed: this period should be considered an aberration, placed into a historical black box and quickly forgotten about. Undoubtedly, many Mongolians feel the same about socialist Mongolia, characterizing this period as a grave mistake. At the 9th Annual International Mongolian Studies Conference in 2015, after I presented on the influences of the Soviet international youth organization, the Young Pioneers, on twentieth-century Mongolian literacy, two Mongolian researchers in the audience were clearly perturbed by the fact that I did not challenge the obvious propagandistic qualities and authoritarian practices that made up this organization.

There are two points that I want to make from these conference experiences. First, the Romanian scholar espoused an anti-intellectual and irresponsible position: instead of interrogating the potential of the recent past, she advocated her own particular “black box” agenda. As I hope to make abundantly clear in chapters 2 through 4, it is both impossible and irresponsible to talk about Mongolian literacy without situating it firmly in its historical, social, political, and economic contexts. For better or worse, Mongolian literacy—even its post-socialist, globalized form—has been profoundly altered by the particular centralized and authoritarian practices of socialist literacy. The second point is prompted by the concerns of the two Mongolian researchers, who obliquely address the responsibilities of literacy researchers, in particular those from the West investigating historical and cultural experiences they did not live through. It is, on the one hand, impossible to blithely describe the literacy development sponsored by the Revolutionary Party without also addressing how the mundane work of literacy was involved in the ideological, authoritarian, and, occasionally, violent activities of the Revolutionary Party and the socialist state. On the other hand, we need to confront the fact that language policies and literacy practices that were established during the socialist period still linger in the post-socialist period and shape Mongolians’ writing and reading. No “black box” exists to conceal a history we would prefer to ignore.

## THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES

As the discussion above about the value of literacy as a historical variable has already suggested, in this book I illuminate the political, social, and cultural potentials of literacy far more than what many readers may be accustomed to. I am not using the “commonsensical” definition of literacy that dominates our thinking about reading and writing. Brian Street (1985) has termed this conventional, commonsensical approach to literacy the “autonomous” perspective, in which literacy is defined as a cognitive process that individuals learn in formal educational settings. According to this perspective, literacy is the encoding (writing) and decoding (reading) of written symbols by an individual, a definition that is tantalizingly simple and powerful and one that, at first glance, appears easy enough to measure: researchers only need to set a “standard” or function, such as the ability to read a text of a certain length, attain a grade level in school, or sign one’s name, to ascertain whether an individual is considered to be literate or not.

To clarify, the autonomous perspective emphasizes these following points about literacy:

- Literacy is a set of generic and universal skills that are acquired by individuals (i.e., reading and writing in one historical context is the same as reading and writing in a different context).
- The key domains of literacy instruction are schools or other formal institutional settings where (usually) children learn to read and write.
- Literacy benefits individuals and societies and can cause or set the conditions for abstract thinking, democracy, industrialization, stronger employment possibilities, bureaucracies, and science, among other benefits (e.g., Finnegan 1988; Graff 1981, 3).

The autonomous perspective has dominated the ways literacy has been represented by UNESCO and other multinational educational organizations (Graff 1987; Graff 2011, 72; Street 1995) and affected the ways in which literacy was defined and used throughout Mongolia and the Soviet world in the twentieth century. Mongolian education administrators, following the guidance of their Soviet advisors, were attracted to this commonsensical, autonomous approach because it enabled comparisons between the pre-revolutionary and the socialist eras and between socialist and capitalist countries. These comparisons enabled socialist policymakers to demonstrate a narrative of progress: socialism was working because literacy rates were increasing. The fact that during the socialist period (as well as



afterwards) there was such an interest in quantifying the number of literate Mongolians before the 1921 People's Revolution underscores the workings of the autonomous perspective (e.g., Kapišovská 2005; Kaplonski 2014; Luvsanbaldan and Shagdarsüren 1986).

*Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* rejects the autonomous perspective, employing instead the “ideological” perspective of the New Literacy Studies (Street 1985). Although I do not recount all of ways in which the ideological perspective counters the autonomous one here, the biggest shift is from a position that privileges “generic skills” and quantification to one that uses an anthropological framework in which literacy becomes a set of specific practices linking people together and placing their writing and reading into larger social, historical, and cultural contexts (Barton and Hamilton 1998, xxiv, 7–10; Baynham and Prinsloo 2009, 2–3; Street 2009, 25). In short, for the purposes of this book, I do not define literacy as a cognitive property of individual Mongolians; I do not examine them as “efficient processors of text” (Baynham and Prinsloo 2009, 2), nor as “generalized subjects” outside of their social positions and historical contexts. Rather, I am interested in the reading and writing of Mongolians as social practices that are constantly changing, shaped by particular historical contexts, authorities, sponsoring institutions, official discourses and policies, local and distant ideologies, past and incipient practices, and technologies. Although certain readers may be disappointed by the fact that this book cannot illuminate answers to the debates regarding the literacy rates between pre-revolutionary and socialist Mongolian periods, the ideological approach promises to be more fruitful and interesting. For example, instead of posing a demographic question regarding the number of literates in the late Qing colonial period, the more important question, I believe, is to examine the ideological purposes for representing literacy in these ways (Hamilton 2012, 26–27) or the rhetorical strategies in which socialist or Revolutionary Party administrators created narratives of progress and drew distinct, socially meaningful boundaries between “illiteracy” and “literacy.” In short, an ideological perspective opens up multidisciplinary inquiries about language, literacy, rhetoric, belief systems, values, attitudes, and actions. An autonomous approach immediately closes down these historical, cultural, and social questions.

The theoretical building blocks or units of analysis of the ideological perspective are literacy practices. According to David Barton and Mary Hamilton (1998, 6), literacy practices act as the “basic unit[s] of a social theory of literacy” in that they link the activities of reading and writing within “the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape.” The definition of a literacy practice contains two parts: first, observable acts, events, and situations that pertain to reading and writing in

some way and, second, unobservable cultural models, ideologies, and values shaped by institutional, political, economic, technological, and cultural forces and flows (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gee 2012; Heath 1983; Street 1985; Street 1995). As James Gee (2012) argues, a literacy becomes a way of doing social action and performing an identity within a particular socially and historically situated community. It is both a way of “doing” literacy acts as well as a type of identity, a way of “being” and thinking (and talking) about language and literacy within a particular community. Gee (2012) goes one step farther: one’s literacy practice constitutes an individual’s identity within a social group.

Because of the power of the commonsensical, autonomous, and modern approaches to literacy, New Literacy Studies researchers spend a great deal of time defamiliarizing and denaturalizing their readers’ own literacy practices. It can be difficult for us to see beyond the practices that we have been socialized into—the ways of using and thinking about printed texts that appear so natural and so much part of our personal lives. One of the most important benefits of the New Literacy Studies is to allow readers to imagine different literacy practices. It demands that readers suspend momentarily the normative assumptions of their own practices—that is, what makes them so natural—and thrust themselves into different imagined worlds. Literacy practices may also differ in purposes, the types and genres of texts that are produced and circulated, their functions, instructional methods, media and technologies, and the languages and scripts that are emphasized. For example, in a well-known description and analysis of literacy use in a Nukulaelae island community in the Pacific Ocean, Niko Besnier (1995) reports on the emotional investment that was invested in personal letters between islanders and their relatives or friends who had traveled abroad; this literacy practice of writing and exchanging letters played more of an important role in expressing certain types of emotion than face-to-face oral exchanges. Besnier’s (1995) depiction denaturalizes the types of genres that are valorized in western societies as well as the assumption that personal oral interactions carry more emotional resonance than written ones.

Three additional examples demonstrate the ways in which our modern conceptions of literacy may make it difficult for us to see the ways in which other societies conceive of and practice literacy. First, our modern assumptions link reading and writing together as two symbiotic skills. Yet this is an assumption that is not necessarily universally held. In pre-modern societies, the acts of reading and writing may be invested with different social and moral values and practiced by different groups of people; according to Michael Clanchy (2012, 49–50), writing required specialized equipment, materials, and training that not all readers in medieval England would have possessed.

Similarly, Byamba Rinchen's (1964) critique of the literacy statistics in pre-revolutionary Mongolia bases itself in part on the fact that early socialist demographers may have calculated literacy rates upon the modern requirement of proficiency in both reading and writing, classifying those as "illiterate" who were able to read yet unable to write.

A second example is the distinction between "intensive" and "extensive" reading, which many modern readers may no longer find meaningful (Clanchy 2012, 196; Dreyfus 2003). Readers in many pre-modern institutional settings or domains, such as the pre-revolutionary Mongolian Tibetan Buddhist Church, would have found it difficult to define many modern western readers' "extensive" consumption and disposal of written texts—for mundane purposes and in vernacular languages—as examples of literacy; these pre-modern readers would have privileged "intensive" literacy practices, the reading, memorization, and recitation of a canon of sacred texts.

A final example is the "modern" assumption that literacy is usually experienced silently by an individual: individuals read silently to themselves and then write silently to other silent readers; that is, there is a clear division between the world of orality and the far more silent world of literacy. To de-naturalize this modern assumption, literacy studies researchers have demonstrated the collective and social nature of many reading experiences in the past and in non-dominant literacy contexts. This research has enabled them to argue that such crude divisions between orality and literacy or, for that matter, between literacy and illiteracy, are not prominent practices in many societies and past historical contexts. Clanchy (2012, 45) reminds us that all people, even those who were nominally "illiterate," depended upon literacy in medieval England. Mastin Prinsloo and Mignonne Breier (1996, 20), similarly, show how "illiterates" and literate "cultural brokers" in late twentieth-century South Africa work together to create social networks, what Barton and Hamilton (1998, xxiv, 12) refer to as a "communal, collective resource." Heath's (1983, 386) "literacy event" is defined with this more complicated, collective, and loose distinction between literacy and illiteracy in mind. Many literacy events may include an oral conversation in which written documents play a role and in which "illiterates" seek out literate mediators to help negotiate the meanings of these documents.

Defining this ideological role of literacy serves as another social practice, one that is usually reserved for educators, academics, and government administrators, who represent literacy and make it a discourse, a way of talking about the social world and a way to shape and to limit people's own practices and understanding of literacy. According to Hamilton (2012), representations of literacy can be shaped by photographs and other visual depictions, embedded in statistics, and recontextualized in narratives and myths. When

embedded in these representation, these discourses about literacy are used by social actors to justify certain actions or policies, naturalize social stratification, and demonize—or valorize—particular social groups (Gee 2012). In the United States, for instance, one recurring representation of literacy has been that of a narrative of crisis. In this representation, symptoms of illiteracy, which are oftentimes traced back to liberal education policies and a disregard for language standards, become the cause of the lack of American unity and stability and its global economic and political decline (e.g., Bloom 1987; Hirsch 1987; Sheils 1975). Many New Literacy Studies scholars, in response, have addressed the rhetorical qualities of the crisis narrative; it was a way, for example, for certain public intellectuals to express their anxiety over the fragmentation of American society and, in particular, the loss of authority of a male, white, and European-based American identity. It is these types of representations—these “rhetorics of literacies”—that will motivate much of *Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia*. Through literary and pedagogical genres, national narratives, government policies, visuals, and statistics, among other sources, Mongolian socialist administrators, Revolutionary Party elites, and distant Soviet advisors and academics depicted literacy for, among other purposes, legitimating the socialist state, maintaining the authority of the Revolutionary Party, and establishing new forms of identity and social participation. Post-socialist Mongolian policymakers and public intellectuals, as well as international development organization researchers, journalists, western academics, and others continue to perpetuate representations of literacy, including literacy crises and language-related narratives of cultural decline and anxiety; of course, the key difference, which I explore in the following three chapters, was that the representations of literacy were tightly and unilaterally controlled by representatives of the socialist state. The “rhetorics of literacies” in post-socialist Mongolia become far more fragmented, complex, and uncontrollable.

### **MONGOLIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

For the remainder of this introduction, I outline the ways in which Mongolian language and literacy intersect with Mongolian political and national history, providing enough historical context for readers to recognize the fact that modern literacy in the socialist twentieth century did not emerge from a cultural and historical vacuum after the 1921 People’s Revolution. In this wide survey, several major themes appear that recur throughout this book. First of all, as we will see in the origins stories related to how Mongolians first

recognized the importance of literacy, Mongolian political leaders have always invested themselves in discourses about literacy, yet, secondly, Mongolians have experienced anxiety over practices emerging from the “outside” as opposed to those originating from “inside” Mongolia. Socialist and post-socialist Mongolian scholars, for example, have represented literacy, on the one hand, as indigenous, authentic, nomadic, and “traditional” practices, or, on the other hand, as practices from foreign, distant, imperial, settled, and urban cultures. Rinchen (1964, 29) separates an “inside” cultural influence on Mongolian language from three “outsider” sources, which included Indian and Tibetan, Chinese and Manchu, and European and Russian traditions. Tsevel Shagdarsüren (2009, 18), in his taxonomy of the approximately ten scripts that have been designed for Mongolian, relies upon the insider/outsider distinction when emphasizing how new scripts were introduced by “Mongols’ own initiative” as opposed to those scripts that were mandated by “the policy of foreign countries [ . . . ] aimed to exclude the Mongols’ cultural inheritance and deepen their [the foreign countries’] own influence.” These categories of “insider” and “outsider” influences are significant, as they indicate attempts to essentialize and simplify Mongolian identity, sorting out what is “authentic” and “pure” from what is “foreign” or “mixed.” Post-socialist discussions about language policies and standards as well as attitudes about language decline are focused in part on this classification logic. For Ivan Sablin (2016, 9) and others, these “inner” versus “outer” classification systems are a part of “boundary construction,” ways to limit the complexity of “transculturality” by “univocal interpretations of particular spaces.” Uradyn Bulag (1998) and other scholars have expanded upon the consequences of this ethnocentric logic, in which Khalkha identity represents authentic Mongolness, and have demonstrated how the process of consolidating, accepting, or rejecting competing Mongolian identities has become more intense in post-socialist Mongolia (see also Billé 2014; Diener 2009).

Instead of a logic of simplicity and homogeneity, *Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* privileges one of complexity and heterogeneity. Elite and non-elite Mongolians, since at least the beginning of the thirteenth century, have encountered many languages and scripts because of the ideological-political, administrative, economic, cultural, and religious interests of, oftentimes, powerful entities in distant centers, either inside or outside the geographical space of Mongolia. Social change, likewise, has been a constant feature of the lives of Mongolians. Although, as David Sneath (2002, 2) has pointed out, several of the practices of the pastoral, semi-nomadic economic lifestyle have been durable since the thirteenth century, in many other respects, the structure of Mongolian society and its institutions and the ideological, technological, economic, religious, and linguistic flows have

diverged wildly and, occasionally, violently. Again, readers need to stay vigilant against romanticizing Mongolians and nomadic pastoralism, a position that conceives of Mongolians as living outside of history as timeless, ahistorical, and isolated beings preserving authentic and pure nomadic practices. In no times have Mongolians stepped outside of history and beyond the flows and influences of their neighbors and distant urban and imperial centers. This idea of a pure isolation is in itself a foreign construction.

In the following sections, after a brief description of Mongolian languages and scripts, I outline several literacy origins stories from the thirteenth century of the Great Mongol Empire. Afterwards, roughly following the first three of the five “educational eras” described by Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2006), I sketch the connections between the dominant political authorities or social institutions with literacy throughout the religious and cultural flows of the Tibetan Buddhist Church, Qing empire colonialism, and the Autonomous Period in the second decade of the twentieth century.

### **Mongolian Language and *Mongol Bichig***

The language that is the focus of this book is Khalkha Mongolian, the dominant and highest status dialect of Mongolia, which is spoken by the Khalkha majority ethnic group, comprising roughly 81.5 percent of the population (Mongolian National Statistical Office 2010) who have historically made central and northern Mongolia their homeland. Importantly, Khalkha includes the prestigious Ulaanbaatar dialect. As the only major urban area in which Mongolian is spoken in the world, Ulaanbaatar Khalkha exhibits the most linguistic innovation (Janhunen 2012, 9–10). Khalkha is a member of the Common Mongolian language group, by far the most significant of all the branches of the larger Mongolic language family. According to Juha Janhunen (2012, 9), Common Mongolian consists of five other dialects besides Khalkha, including Oirat, Buryat, Ordos, Khamnigan, and Khorchin (see Binnick 1987 for alternative ways to categorize Mongolian languages). In the far western *aimags*, in addition to Kazakh Mongolians, members of the most significant non-Mongolian language minority, there are several small non-Khalkha Mongolian ethnic groups such as the Dorvod (2.8 percent of the 2010 population) and Bayad (2.2 percent) that compose the Oirat Mongolian ethnic group and language community. Small groups of Buryat dialect speakers exist in northern Mongolia, related culturally and linguistically to Buryat Russian groups. Janhunen (2012, 14) reports that many of these non-Khalkha dialects are in the process of language death due to the pressure of Khalkha, a process which started in the twentieth century (Möömöö and Mönkh-Amgalan 1984, 16, 159). Despite the lack of visibility of these peripheral non-Khalkha

ethnic groups in Mongolia itself, a veritable ethnographic industry has arisen to depict them to Western, English-speaking audiences (e.g., Buyandelger 2013; Empson 2011; Humphrey and Onon 1996; Pedersen 2011). Presently, the number of Common Mongolian dialect speakers in Inner Mongolia and other adjacent Chinese provinces is equivalent to that of Mongolia; yet, due to the pressure of Chinese and the forces of cultural sinicization, the number of Common Mongolian speakers in China is decreasing (Janhunen 2012, 11–12). Moreover, these Mongolian dialects in China are regarded with a degree of mistrust by some Khalkha speakers, many of whom may question the “purity” of these social languages (Billé 2014; Bulag 1998; Diener 2009).

Of the three scripts that will be addressed in this book, *Uigarjin Mongol Bichig* (Uighur Mongolian Writing), which I refer to simply as *Mongol Bichig*,<sup>1</sup> is the indigenous or “inside” script, unlike Mongolian Cyrillic, adapted from Russian Cyrillic in the 1940s, and the Latin alphabet, which has become common in post-socialist Mongolia because of the dominance of English, globalization, and new digital technologies. As the origins stories about *Mongol Bichig* suggest, Mongolian intellectuals are anxious about the degree to which *Mongol Bichig* promotes an authentic Mongolian literacy. The name itself emphasizes its similarity to the script used by the non-Mongolian Uighur people of northern China (Sanzheyev 1988).

The conventional account of how *Mongol Bichig* was transmitted to the northern Mongolian groups is that near the end of the twelfth century a script was adapted for the Mongolian language from Sogdian, an Aramaic-based Semitic script used by Sogdian merchants and traders who traveled from what is now modern Uzbekistan in Central Asia to China and who interacted with the non-Mongolian Uighurs, adapters themselves of a Sogdian script, as well as other Mongolian groups migrating around the western region of the Mongolian plateau (Coulmas 1996, 472; Skjærvø 2006, 503). Yet the exact nature and time of the transmission of the script from the Sogdians to the Mongols have been contentious. Here, these scholarly debates about the dates of transmission become highly rhetorical, returning to the major theme of how Mongolian cultural practices are organized according to a simplistic binary of “insiders” and “outsiders.” The literary independence of the modern Mongolian nation is at stake. Did these nomadic Mongolian groups borrow and adapt the script from the Uighur version, in effect making the Mongolian adapters dependent upon the sedentary Uighurs as cultural mediators and guides? Or, did Mongolians themselves adapt the script independently from the Sogdians, a historical version that posits far more agency to Mongolians and appeases feelings of cultural pride? (Luvsanbaldan and Shagdarsüren 1986, 8; Sanzheyev 1988). It is not

my intention to solve this controversy here; the fact that this debate exists in the first place is what is important for our purposes.

*Mongol Bichig* is written from top to bottom and from left to right and is composed of a set of characters with such descriptive mnemonics as “stomach” (*gedes*), “tail” (*süül*), and “crown” (*titem*). Depending upon whether the letters begin a word, occur in the middle, or end the word, the characters can take slightly different forms. *Mongol Bichig* characters are ambiguous: certain letters can be read as two phonemes, including, for instance, the vowel sounds “o” and “u” and “ö” and “ü” and consonants such as “t” and “d” and “j” and “z.” Furthermore, the relationship of *Mongol Bichig* to the spoken form represents an example of deep orthography: instead of representing the phonetics of the spoken forms of the various Mongolian dialects, it represents the sounds of an earlier, thirteenth-century dialect (Janhunen 2012), revealing the earlier linguistic history. Byambajav Tsenddoo (2007, 189) exemplifies the lack of correspondence between contemporary oral pronunciation of such common words as *khaana* (where) and *chono* (wolf) and their equivalents in *Mongol Bichig*, *khamigaa* and *chinua*, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that socialist critics, as we will see in chapter 3, derided *Mongol Bichig* for its phonemic ambiguity and its lack of a phonetic relationship with contemporary pronunciation, it is just these pre-modern linguistic qualities, according to several Mongolian and Western scholars, that allowed *Mongol Bichig* to endure as an ideal medium for highly scattered nomadic language communities. This alphabet possessed enough internal consistency for literary languages to develop among the major Mongolian dialects, whereas its ambiguity and lack of a standardized character-sound correspondence enabled the different dialects to develop independently. Shagdarsüren (2009, 20) questions attempts to reform *Mongol Bichig*, writing,

[I]t was more or less coincidentally a step back toward the “main” principles of Mongolian script, which were established around the aim of providing a common script for all Mongol nomads scattered widely over vast territories, uniting different ethnic Mongols [who] were able to communicate their diverse dialects of Mongolian through a common amalgamated script.

Garma Sanzheyev (1988, 23) emphasizes the variability and lack of standardization of *Mongol Bichig*, which may differ not only among dialect-ethnic groups and regions but from one Buddhist temple to the next or from one teacher to another.

Withstanding challenges from other scripts designed or sponsored by Mongolian elites, reform attempts, and linguistic flows from more dominant textual and intellectual traditions, *Mongol Bichig* has persisted for more than



800 years. In Mongolia, *Mongol Bichig* served official purposes from the early period of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century up until 1941, the year in which the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Party officially adopted Mongolian Cyrillic, a script reform policy that came into effect in 1950. From the Yuan dynasty into the Ming dynasty, *Mongol Bichig* was the written *lingua franca* for several non-Mongolian groups, including the Manchu, who adapted the script for the official Manchu language (Crossley 1994, 343). In China, it is still used by ethnic Mongolians in the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia and adjacent provinces, although its visibility in cities such as Hohhot is limited. In post-socialist Mongolia, *Mongol Bichig* exists as a ceremonial script, appearing on official state documents, government building signs, store signs appealing to a traditional Mongolian identity, body tattoos, and calligraphic, artistic objects for tourists.

### The Great Mongol Empire and the Origins of Literacy

In 1206, Temujin, one of the clan-lineage heads of the Mongol tribe, unified the other Mongolian clan-lineages and khanates on the Mongolian Plateau and was proclaimed Chinggis Khan, the new ruler of the Great Mongol Empire (Baabar 1999, 24). Chinggis quickly expanded the empire to the south and the west, incorporating non-Mongolian groups through military conquest. After Chinggis's death in 1227, his sons and other Chinggisid military leaders expanded the Mongol Empire until, by 1259, it became the largest land empire of all time before breaking up into four Mongol states (Atwood 2004, 365, 369). Although it is possible to date literacy and writing systems in Mongolia earlier than the emergence of Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Empire (Kara 2005), it is most fruitful to begin the history of reading and writing, at least for the northern Mongolian groups, with the convergence of imperial power and administrative requirements in the thirteenth century.

After all, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the seminal Mongolian text, which narrates the rise of Chinggis Khan and is part historical chronicle, part biography, and part epic, among other genres, demonstrates the emergence of writing in Mongolian. As one of the few artifacts of *Mongol Bichig* in the thirteenth century, in addition to the 1225 Chinggis Stone (Kara 2005), *The Secret History of the Mongols* acknowledges writing for the first time; furthermore, even though its authorship, its year of "publication," and its genealogy are complicated and disputed (see de Rachewiltz 2006, xxix–lix; Hung 1951; Man 2005, 23, 31–37), its existence in itself shows the growing awareness of the importance of writing as an administrative and ideological technology. Many scholars now agree that the intended audience of *The Secret History of the Mongols* was the elite Chinggisid leadership in successive

generations (Hoàng 2000, 17), suggesting a conservative function for literacy in which the stories and symbols that legitimate the power of Chinggis Khan are collected and passed down.

As *The Secret History of the Mongols* indicates, as well as the literacy origins stories below, Chinggisid rulers recognized the administrative and symbolic importance of writing; for example, Chinggis Khan's successor, Ögedei, sponsored schools for the elite sons and daughters of his court to learn Chinese (Khorloo 2012, 8–9). Additionally, Khubilai Khan, the grandson of Chinggis Khan and leader of the southernmost of the successor states of the Mongol Empire, the Yuan dynasty in China (1271–1368), initiated an early example of official, top-down language planning. Khubilai invited the Tibetan Buddhist Phags-pa Lama to the imperial court, one of many such close relationships that the Mongolian khans would forge with Tibetan religious and intellectual mediators and that, furthermore, solidified Tibetan loyalty to the khans and manifested their cultural authority. Khubilai requested the Phags-pa Lama to develop a universal script, which became known as the *Dörvöljin Bichig* (Square Script), for all of the languages of the Yuan dynasty, including Mongolian, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese Mandarin, and others (Luvsanbaldsan and Shagdarsüren 1986, 13). Khubilai's Square Script ideal solidifies the relationship between imperial power and literacy, demonstrating the universal reach of Khubilai's authority through all the languages of the empire (see Crossley 1994, 347). However, despite the official resources and commitment that was given to the Square Script, including its use in state and religious documents as well as in official decrees, seals, coins, and paper money, it did not survive beyond the Yuan dynasty (Luvsanbaldsan and Shagdarsüren 1986).

In *The Secret History of the Mongols* and other sources, several origins stories narrate the ways in which Chinggis Khan and members of his court recognized the importance of writing and sponsored the development of literacy. It is important to recognize the rhetorical qualities of these origins stories: they work on their readers (or listeners) in certain ways to fix particular definitions of and attitudes about literacy. These origins stories tell us more about the storytellers themselves—and the historians who re-circulate these stories—than about the historical “facts” of the transmission and adaptation of early scripts.

A popular origins story reaffirms the Uighurs as the source for writing as a foreign technology, the power of which was then immediately recognized by Chinggis Khan. Literacy, in this case, was a spoil of war in the final victorious battle against the Naiman, the most powerful Mongolian khanate in the west (Atwood 2004, 397), which enabled Chinggis Khan to unify the Mongol Empire. At the end of this battle, Chinggis Khan's soldiers came across

Tatatunga, an elite Uighur scribe who had led the administration of the Naiman state. He was captured cradling to his chest a seal, a literacy technology that not only saved Tatatunga's life but propelled him into the middle of Chinggis Khan's court. Foreseeing the potential of literacy as a technology for the administration of his united Mongol Empire, Chinggis appointed Tata-tunga as a *bagsh* (teacher) to teach the Uighur script to the children of elites (Khorloo 2012, 18–19; Luvsanbaldan and Shagdarsüren 1986, 8; Nadmid 1967, 24). Several scholars discount this origins story as a legend and point to the literary sophistication of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, conventionally dated at 1240, to show that the Mongolians must have adopted the Uighur script earlier in the twelfth century (Sanzheyev 1988, 12). Yet what may be most important about this origins story is the particular relationship between literacy and power that it tells. The emergence of the Mongol Empire was not to be based on violence alone but on literacy-centered technologies of administration that the Mongolians quickly adapted from cultures with more sophisticated governmental systems.

The second origins story, from *The Secret History of the Mongols*, consolidates the link between literacy and power. In one of the many reward speeches that make up the 1206 inaugural ceremony of Chinggis Khan as leader of the unified Mongolian tribes (see Marzluf 2013), Chinggis grants his adopted brother, Shikhi Khutuktu, several powers and responsibilities. First, Shikhi is bestowed with the power of the censor, responsible for dividing up the conquered groups and apportioning them out as subjects to Chinggis's family and elite leaders. Second, Shikhi is given "the power of judgement over all" (de Rachewiltz 2006, 135) to control "theft" and "falsehood," a judicial responsibility that entails the power to punish. Third, and most important for the origins stories of literacy, Shikhi is appointed the official scribe of the Mongolian nation and empowered to record the decisions he has made as censor and judge:

[W]riting in a blue-script register all decisions about the distribution and about the judicial matters of the population, make it into a book. Until the offspring of my offspring, let no one alter any of the blue writing that [Shikhi Khutuktu], after deciding in accordance with me, shall make into a book with white paper. Anyone who alters it shall be guilty and liable to punishment. (de Rachewiltz 2006, 135–36)

Chinggis's reward speech places writing in the center of the governance of the new Mongol state. Writing serves as a technology for controlling Chinggis's subjects and for formalizing and fixing the legal code. Writing writes the state.

In this origins story, literacy is quite obviously not a possession, skill, practical technology, or resource for individuals, nor does it serve the purposes of democratization, social equality, economic development, tradition and cultural preservation, and personal expression, all of which serve the most common justifications for Western literacy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Literacy is defined instead as a technology that ascribes, legitimates, and displays the power of Chinggis's rule. It is a convenient technology for the Mongol Empire insofar as it represents and extends the authority of Chinggis Khan, whose power in turn has been authorized and legitimated by the natural and divine symbols and omens recorded in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. To this end, literacy is a technology and resource that is limited to and strictly controlled by the Chinggisid elite. Yet an anxiety over writing surfaces in this reward speech: Chinggis utters the possibility for writing to be "altered"—changed, revised, erased, and destroyed; writing is not imagined to be a permanent and reliable extension of state power. Chinggis sets a statute of limitations, proclaiming that Shikhi's textual authority should last only "[u]ntil the offspring of my offspring" (de Rachewiltz 2006, 135); at the same time, Chinggis declares a censorship law and penalty for those who would attempt to "alter" any of the census or legal records that Shikhi has inscribed. This early language policy example reinforces Chinggis's assumption about literacy: because of the fact that textual authority becomes state authority, any textual alterations materially change the Mongolian state and de-legitimate those who have been authorized to rule. Any unauthorized revision challenges, changes, or possibly nullifies Chinggis's power. He needs, thus, more legislation—more writing—to contain and control this power of writing.

### **Buddhist Literacies**

After the disintegration of the Great Mongol Empire and the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, the "second conversion" of Tibetan Buddhism in the late sixteenth century (Wallace 2009, 77) was the most important example of literacy institution building in Mongolia until the socialist mass literacy movements of the middle of the twentieth century. It is important not to underestimate the significance of the Mongolian Buddhist Church, which was the dominant social, cultural, and educational institution in Mongolia until its violent suppression in the late 1930s. In the seventeenth century, Mongolian Khalkha elites established the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, the *Bogda Gegeen*, or "Holy Brilliance," a reincarnated leader who became the focal point of Mongolian Buddhism until 1924 and, according to Christopher Atwood (2004, 267), the "foundation stone of Khalkha identity." These religious innovations did not

occur in a historical vacuum: the position of the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu incited power struggles between Khalkha leaders and Oirat Mongolian groups in the west, leading the Khalkha nobles to forge an alliance with the Manchu emperor (Atwood 2004, 268) and, in effect, subjugating themselves to the Qing empire. Furthermore, Buddhist leaders suppressed, eradicated, pushed to the margins, and absorbed shamanist belief practices, which were largely conducted orally (Heissig 1980, 2).

The hundreds of monastic communities that supported the institution of Tibetan Buddhism, according to Walther Heissig (1980, 34), “provided the first profound break with the old economic system of the Mongols,” meaning that Buddhist monasteries served as important centers of literacy throughout the countryside; additionally, these institutions supported international, national, and local communication with other major monasteries or smaller temples and were centers of trade, pilgrimage, and other economic activity (Sneath 2006). The religious schools themselves emphasized well-defined curricula for reading and writing, memorization techniques, strategies for synthesizing texts, and text-based debates (see Dreyfus 2003, 83–87, 160, 213–14). These intensive reading practices and values promoting textual traditions, it is important to note, were conducted almost exclusively in Tibetan, regarded as the “purist” language for the expression of Buddhist scripture and the *lingua franca* of the Buddhist community in Tibet, northern China, and Mongolia (Wallace 2009, 77). According to critics as wide-ranging as the Protestant missionary and ethnographer in the late nineteenth century, James Gilmour (1895), and the contemporary Mongolian historian, Baabar (1999, 98), the dominance of Tibetan came at a cost as it weakened the intellectual and literary activities of Mongolians in their native language.

Despite these concerns, Buddhist literacy was visible to non-elite herders in their everyday lives, even if they themselves had no instruction in the Tibetan script. Because of the high number of males who were involved in some fashion with the Buddhist Church, with estimates as high as 44 percent of the male population (Rinchen 1964, 29), there was a tremendous chance that common herders interacted in some way with Buddhist literacy practices and domains. Vesna Wallace (2009, 77–80) reports that shorter, less costly religious handbooks written in Mongolian were produced for Mongolian audiences; in addition, at least in the twentieth century, the Mongolian vernacular was used by traveling monks, acting as teachers, astrologer-seers, and doctors to create sacred or quasi-sacred documents, including letters, sacrifices, prayer wheel notes, horoscopes, charms, calendars, and divination tables. Needless to say, the linguistic environment for Tibetan Buddhist practices was complex; to add to this complexity, the

Tibetan script was used by low-ranking Buddhist lamas and Chinese merchants to transliterate Mongolian (Bawden 1989, 87).

At elite levels, Mongolian Buddhist leaders and their supporters, who included Khalkha hereditary rulers as well as the Manchu emperors, sponsored the development of concrete, literacy-related institutions, texts, and practices. Perhaps most importantly were the immense translation projects of Tibetan sacred texts into Mongolian, such as the 108 volumes of the *Kanjur* and the 226 volumes of the *Tanjur* (Heissig 1980, 33), which precipitated the need for translation schools and orthography textbooks (Heissig 1980, 28), and according to Heissig (1980, 30–31), the “intellectual leap” necessary to adapt new philosophical and theological concepts, a transformation that expanded the conceptual vocabulary of Mongolian and enriched the language (Rinchen 1964, 29). Mongolian Buddhist leaders and intellectuals devised new scripts and attempted to reform *Mongol Bichig*, such as the *Tod Bichig* (Clear Script) adopted by the Oirat in western Mongolian (Taupier 2015); the 90-character Soyombo Script devised by Zanabazar, the first Jebtsundamba Khutuktu (Luvsanbaldsan and Shagdarsüren 1986, 19–20); and the addition of “transcription” (*galig*) letters to *Mongol Bichig*, enabling it to express sounds from foreign languages (Atwood 2004, 562; Kara 2005, 86). Mongolian Buddhism fostered a literary tradition, including indigenous pedagogical genres (Wickham-Smith 2015), and an active publishing and manuscript copying industry, which helped not only to support religious scribes (Wallace 2009, 84–85) but to forge complex networks among those who made paper and produced ink locally, those who imported paper and other manuscript preparation materials, and local silversmiths, blacksmiths, wood carvers, tailors, and embroiderers, all who were involved in manufacturing costly and decorative sutras (Wallace 2009, 82–83, 92).

### The Qing Empire and Scribal Literacy

In the seventeenth century, as Khalkha and other Mongolian leaders vied for control over Mongolia with Oirats in the far west, these elites, first in Inner Mongolia and then in 1691 in Outer Mongolia, accepted the protection of the Qing emperor, an agreement that for approximately 220 years converted Khalkha nobles into colonial subjects, restricting their power to control international negotiations, the military, and economic policies. The terminology of Inner and Outer Mongolia references this Qing colonial logic: “Inner Mongolia” indicated that these Mongolian groups were closer to the Manchu imperial center in Beijing and more closely aligned with the empire; Outer Mongolia, on the other hand, represented the lands of the Khalkha nobles (and,

after their defeat in the eighteenth century, those of the western Oirats) who were far more distant from the Qing leaders. Outer Mongolia became a peripheral part of the Qing empire, used as a source for additional military support and controlled by Manchu policies that “aimed to prevent the economic penetration of Mongolia from the [Chinese] homeland” (Bawden 1989, 82) and restricted interaction between the Mongolians and the Chinese. In addition to transforming the political geography of Mongolia and reorganizing the titles of the Mongolian nobility (Bawden 1989, 81–82), the Manchu leadership introduced a scribal literacy culture as a key method in administering this distant colony. The Qing colonial structure was “pyramidal,” which, according to Thomas Ewing (1980, 7), accounts for its stability: instead of direct and intrusive Manchu control at the local level, a small group of secretaries (*bicheech*) and assistants (*tuslagch*) read, composed, copied, and circulated official documents, which either originated from the Lifan Yuan, the “court of colonial affairs” (Di Cosmo 1998, 294) in Beijing or from Uliasutai, the Qing administrative center in Mongolia. These scribes performed state service in one of the many *khoshuu* administrative offices controlled independently by hereditary Mongolian nobles, in the *aimag* counsels that oversaw the *khoshuu* offices, or in the ministries (Rinchen 1964, 30).

To facilitate this scribal administration and train scribes, temporary or short-term schools were established, especially for the sons of the local nobility. In 1767, a school in Khovd was opened for twenty students in Mongolian and Manchu, and in the following year a military school in Uliasutai was established; in the 1770s and 1780s, *khoshuu*-level schools were established for two to ten students, which also included children from non-elite families (Shagdar 2003, 23). In 1811, a Khüree (now Ulaanbaatar) resolution announced the need for four administrators to be literate in *Mongol Bichig* in each of the fourteen relay stations (*örtöö*) that linked Khüree to the main north-south trade route (Sharkhüü 1965, 6), an indication that basic literacy instruction occurred in non-school settings. Tsend Damdinsüren (1990) and Jamsran Sambuu (2010) also describe informal home schools and apprenticeships that provided opportunities for becoming a scribe. Other education models existed, the most interesting of which being the modernization and reform efforts of Bat-Ochir Togtokhtör (To-wang), a local noble who in the first half of the nineteenth century made education compulsory for all the children in his *khoshuu* regardless of their nobility status, developed his own teaching materials, promoted the arts, and compiled a book on pastoralism (Fletcher 1978, 354–55).

The countryside *khoshuu* administrative office was the key site of Qing administrative literacy, in which documents were circulated to and from Beijing through the relay stations and administrative centers. *Khoshuu* scribes, who by the nineteenth century were increasingly represented by non-elite

Mongolians (Di Cosmo 1998, 301), transcribed, translated, and copied administrative documents in Mongolian and Manchu and responded to various decrees, orders, and requests from Qing leaders. Of particular interest were the *khoshuu* accounts, tax collection (Sambuu 2010, 50), land surveying, and reports on the whereabouts of Mongolian religious and political leaders. In addition to these documents, Qing-era scribes were responsible for reading out legal texts in local courts (Gilmour 1895, 282–83) as well as the panoply of identification and travel documents that were required for movement and access to relay stations (e.g., see Ossendowski 2007, 93, 97, 170–71). Writing about his experiences as a *khoshuu* clerk apprentice at the end of the Qing empire, Sambuu (2010, 63) describes the highly formalized and ritualized ceremonial language of the Manchu court in these reports, parodies of which existed in folk literature (Bawden 2003, 193–96). Aleksei Pozdneyev (1971, 163), a keen observer of the material aspects of a *khoshuu* scribe's profession in the last decade of the nineteenth century, describes the literacy-related materials of one office:

[O]n a special table in front of the k'ang [a raised, heated platform] is the office seal, which is kept in a box under lock and key and also wrapped in a piece of silken material, as well as a box in which the vermilion and the inkstands for writing are kept. About the walls hang the registers which are used for recording incoming and outgoing documents, and on the k'ang there is a whole pile of documents being processed. (163)

In another *khoshuu* scene, however, Pozdneyev (1971, 109) reveals the impoverishment of these offices. The core responsibility of one *khoshuu* scribe was to purchase paper, ink, ink brushes, and vermilion from a Chinese merchant and then to find a way to pay for this expenditure, which included writing a memo to the *aimag* counsel justifying the expense and requesting more supplies.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Qing administration began to promote education reform. One important reform change was the inclusion of Chinese language classes for scribes, ending the Qing language policies that limited Chinese and segregated Mongolians from the Chinese. These language-specific policies forbade the teaching of Chinese (Bawden 1989, 86), prohibited Mongolian nobles from giving their children Chinese names, and, as late as 1876, outlawed Mongolians from using the Chinese script (Laikhansüren 2015). However, official proclamations, such as those in 1898 and 1908 establishing Manchu and Chinese script schools (Sharkhüü 1965, 4, 6), demonstrate the extent to which the Manchu leaders of the Qing had been culturally and linguistically absorbed by the Han Chinese (Sharkhüü 1965, 6). As late as 1919, when Chinese leadership briefly took direct control over



Mongolia again, education and language policy reforms were considered that would have encouraged Chinese immigrants to learn Mongolian in order to encourage intermarriage and cross-cultural relationships (Ewing 1980, 145).

### **The Autonomous Period and Education Reform Discourses**

The Autonomous Period (1911–1919) is brief, marking the decade of the theocratic government of the Bogd Khan, the eighth and final Jebtsundamba Khutuktu after the collapse of the Qing empire. Nonetheless, this period influenced the development of modern literacy during the socialist period. Although the Bogd Khan's government continued to stress temporary alphabet schools for the purposes of scribal administration, Buryat-Russian advisors, such as the ubiquitous Jamsran Tseveen, more commonly known as Jamtsarano, imported new discourses about education reform and literacy from Europe and czarist Russia. These Russian intellectuals sponsored early newspaper publication and translation projects, including the 1909 *News of Mongolia (Mongolyn Sonin Bichig)* and *The New Mirror (Shine Toli)* (Ewing 1980, 79), and three printing houses were established (Baabar 1999, 170), obviating the need to depend on the printing industry centered in Beijing for secular texts (Kara 2005). Another obvious example of the influence of czarist Russia on Mongolian educational thinking was the fact that a small group of students were sent to Kyakhta or Irkutsk in Russia to study (Jigmedsüren and Baljirgarmaa 1966, 66). Several of the Mongolians from common herder families, who participated as students or as scribal administrators for the Bogd Khan's government, became members of the early Mongolian People's Party (the precursor to the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party), such as, most notoriously, Khorloo Choilbasan, the future authoritative ruler of socialist Mongolia.

A modern discourse about literacy and education represented another "symbol of modernity" for this fledgling state (Ewing 1980, 37), joining other new national symbols such as national holidays, a national flag, an army, a new name for the capital city (i.e., Niislel Khüree), and a Western-styled government (Ewing 1980, 37). Jamtsarano, who, in 1912, worked for both the Russian Consulate and the Mongolian Foreign Ministry (Atwood 2004, 619), mapped out for the first time a national and modern curriculum, one that consisted of three levels (primary, secondary, and post-secondary), did not differentiate between males and females, centered instruction around the native language, and included diverse subjects, such as Mongolian language, mathematics, geometry, world affairs, national culture and history, international history, and health, as well as schools with different technical specializations (Rinchen 1964, 41). Jamtsarano also emphasized

the importance of instruction in Russian, Chinese, as well as Mongolian translation, emphasizing on one hand the importance of foreign languages in polytechnical schools and, on the other hand, the importance of Mongolian for maintaining the national heritage, culture, and religion (Rinchen 1964, 42). Afterwards, in addition to Jamtsarano's European vision for Mongolian education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1914 proclaimed the importance of mass education for men and women at all levels and across all cities and countryside settlements (Jigmedsüren and Baljirgarmaa 1966, 23–24). In this document, the ministry administrators went so far as to forecast appropriate future targets for literacy rates: eight or nine out of ten men should become literate, as well as seven or eight out of ten women. Although it would be a mistake to link these early positions of Jamtsarano and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs administrators with modern literacy values such as citizenship and equality, there was for the first time an attempt to link literacy to the overall effectiveness of the government. Adapting and expanding upon a well-known Mongolian proverb,<sup>3</sup> the 1914 Ministry of Foreign Affairs document links reading to state governance:

[I]f you can't read, you won't have any knowledge over the proper customs; without knowledge of the customs, you won't be able to behave properly; if you can't behave properly, you won't be able to manage your own family; and, if you can't manage your own family, you won't be able to run the country. (Jigmedsüren and Baljirgarmaa 1966, 23)

Despite these modern discourses about literacy and education, it is uncertain how different the Autonomous alphabet or writing schools were from those established during the Qing colonial period. A state school was established in 1912 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in the new capital, Niislel Khüree; by 1914 this school included 46 students (Shagdar 2003, 32–33); in addition to this, a military school and a seven-year middle school were established in the capital in 1913 as well as approximately 60 schools in the countryside. These schools continued to stress basic literacy in order to meet the administrative needs of the new government, and many of the educational decisions maintained the social structure from the Qing period. Although extending language instruction to promising non-elite children was not entirely excluded, the official decrees still identified the young male children of nobles as students. In addition to Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese, Russian literacy courses became more regularly offered. Finally, especially given the enormous growth of English in the twenty-first century, it is interesting to note that a British citizen began teaching English language classes for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1915 (Jigmedsüren and Baljirgarmaa 1966, 124).

## CHAPTER PLAN

The scope of *Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* extends beyond the Autonomous Period, focusing first on the socialist Mongolian People's Republic (1924–1992), the world's second independent communist country (Diener 2009, 95), before then concentrating on the post-socialist State of Mongolia, a period inaugurated by the 1990 Democratic Revolution. Chapters 2 through 4 show the dramatic shift in attitudes toward education and literacy during the socialist twentieth century, in which literacy became an important social technology in consolidating the power of the Revolutionary Party, legitimating the rule of the socialist Mongolian state, and making it appear natural, commonsensical, and inevitable. These chapters acknowledge at the same time the political consequences of literacy: the authoritarian Revolutionary Party consolidated its power through campaigns of state-sponsored terror against feudal pre-revolutionary elites, Buddhist leaders, government and military officials, intellectuals, and many others (Baabar 1999; Morozova 2009); at the same time, the Revolutionary Party manifested its authority by developing an extensive literacy infrastructure in the Mongolian countryside, producing what Ole Bruun calls the “totally organized community” (qtd. in Pedersen 2011, 20). In chapter 2, I argue that pastoral home schooling was a key strategy in acculturating young Mongolians in the early decades of the Mongolian People's Republic and demonstrated how a pastoral literacy can exist outside of an urban or authoritative center. In chapter 3, I analyze how Revolutionary Party administrators represented literacy through metanarratives or social models, statistics, and pedagogical genres. These representations were important in allowing the Revolutionary Party to impose a monopoly over how literacy was imagined and practiced. In chapter 4, I examine literacy events orchestrated by the Revolutionary Party, including the literacy experiences of children in the Young Pioneers or, for adult learners, the Cultural Campaigns of the late 1950s and 1960s, during which hygiene, health, literacy, and ideology goals mobilized pastoral Mongolians to create a new social order, way of living, and modern subjectivity.

The final three chapters of *Language, Literacy, and Social Change in Mongolia* address issues of literacy crisis and language anxiety that have arisen since the democratic and free market reforms of the early 1990s. Chapter 5 demonstrates the difficulty of talking about post-socialist literacy because of the fact that an authoritarian literacy “sponsor” or center—such as the previous power of the Revolutionary Party—no longer exists. Analyzing the National Center for Non Formal and Distance Education (now called the National Center for Lifelong Education), I show the different directions this government organization was pulled because of competing ways to define literacy by

international aid organizations and by national and local interests. In chapter 6, I describe several popular language ideologies in post-socialist Mongolia that express anxiety over the effects of globalization, such as the perceived lowering standards of Mongolian usage and the popularity of English and other foreign languages. I argue that at least three dominant language ideologies currently exist and conflict with each other in Mongolia: a national language ideology; a post-socialist global English ideology tied to the values of transnational development, neoliberal economic policies, and post-industrial educational practices; and, a traditionalist Mongolian language ideology that links Mongolians to primordial symbols of the land and the pastoral economy. Finally, chapter 7 extends these ideologies and anxieties about language and literacy and applies them to the urban linguistic landscapes of Ulaanbaatar and Sükhbaatar City. This chapter documents the number of languages and scripts that are visible in these urban areas and analyzes the results in terms of tacit language policies and the types of Mongolian public audiences—and, consequently, identities—that are targeted.

## NOTES

1. *Uigarjin Mongol Bichig* is also referred to as *Uigarjin, Khuuchin Bichig* (Old Script), or *Bosoo Bichig* (Vertical Script).
2. Tsenddoo (2007, 189–90) reminds us that the pronunciation of many Soviet terms diverges from their rendering in Cyrillic Mongolian.
3. The 1914 Ministry of Foreign Affairs document refers to this proverb: “Fix yourself / Then fix your home / Fix your home / Then fix your state” (Raymond 2014, 47).